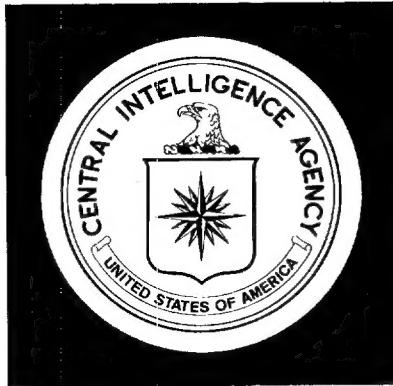


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Intelligence Report

The Succession in China

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
October 1975

INTELLIGENCE REPORT

The Succession in China

The issue of the succession to Mao Tse-tung--and more recently to Chou En-lai as well--is one of the most troublesome in Chinese politics. In one form or another it has been a cause of disputes in the Chinese leadership for more than a decade, and the issue today is by no means completely resolved. Problems concerning the succession were a major factor in the fall of both Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao, each of whom had been successively designated as Mao's "chosen" successor; they also helped precipitate not only the Cultural Revolution of 1966-69 but also the anti-Confucius campaign of 1974. The disarray these two movements engendered in part suggests the high stakes for which the major contenders for ultimate power believe they are playing, but at the same time the contentiousness which the movements revealed and exacerbated has made resolution of the central problem more difficult. Teng Hsiao-ping, who now runs the country on a day-to-day basis, recently remarked to foreign newsmen that he expected difficulties in the transition period following the death of Mao and Chou.

There are three essential problems impinging on the succession question. One involves policy, one is largely institutional, and one is primarily personal in nature. All three issues interact with one another, and the leading figures among the Chinese leadership probably do not entirely separate them out at any given moment. The policy issue basically revolves around differing views about how China should be run and how its institutions should be organized. Should, that is, China follow

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a course that is essentially "pragmatic," building a modern economy, encouraging technical skills, pursuing the goals of a modern nation-state under strong central direction and control, or should "shortcuts" be attempted through stress on revolutionary elan, ideological purity and mass effort, even at the expense of institutional cohesion, rational planning and the rapid development of technical expertise.

The institutional issue involves essentially a question of how power should be distributed among the major organs of state--the party, the government and the military. Should, that is, authority reside primarily in the party, as was the case in the 1950s and early 1960s, should it lie primarily with the military, as was the case in the late 1960s, or should it be distributed among all three institutions, as has been the case in the past four years. This issue is further complicated by divisions within the major institutions themselves. The party and to a lesser degree the government, for example, has long been split between a majority group devoted to the "pragmatic" tasks of modern nation-building under close centralized control who suffered greatly during the Cultural Revolution but have more recently been resurgent, and a smaller, ideologically-oriented "radical" group advocating the efficacy of mass enthusiasm who did well in the Cultural Revolution but have recently been partly eclipsed, while the military is divided between a technically-oriented group stressing the importance of modern weapons and a group stressing the importance of ideological motivation in warfare, as well as between the friends and enemies of the late defense minister, Lin Piao.

Personal issues, while real, are more shadowy. In retrospect it seems likely that personal differences long existed among the Chinese leadership; these differences were greatly sharpened and intensified by the struggles of the Cultural Revolution and more recent squabbles; some of these antipathies probably run too deep for any but the most temporary amelioration or truce. Those who were attacked in 1966-68 resent their accusers; those who did the attacking are fearful that old scores will eventually be paid off.

Formally at least, the Chinese envisage some form of collective leadership to succeed Mao and Chou. This collegial group is likely to be composed of a half

dozen or more leaders who now occupy important positions in Peking. Apart from the fact that all are now individuals of great importance in China, however, the members of this group are a disparate lot, varying greatly in age, experience, ideological outlook and institutional loyalties. Strains tending to pull them apart are already visible. These strains are likely to intensify once the charismatic authority of Mao and to a lesser extent Chou is no longer a factor in leadership politics. It is unlikely that the collegial group will immediately split apart following these two leaders' death, however. All members of the collective leadership will be acutely aware of China's weakness in the early post Mao/Chou period, and all have been traumatized by the divisions engendered by the Cultural Revolution and would probably hope to avoid a new and ungovernable upheaval of similar magnitude. The prospect then is for a period of behind-the-scenes maneuvering as individuals and shifting groups jockey for advantage.

The trend at present is toward a return to a "pragmatic" and authoritarian ordering of the Chinese state along lines similar to those prevalent in the 1950s and early 1960s. This trend accords with the known views of Chou En-lai and appears to have the backing of Mao; it is unlikely to be reversed prior to the death of both these men, but the current pace of restoration of the status quo ante is such that it is also unlikely that the process will be complete before the succession takes place. The return to pragmatism and order has been accomplished largely at the expense of the "radical" wing of the party, which has already been so weakened that it probably will not be in a position to make a bid for power in the immediate succession period. However, the movement toward more traditional ways of doing business also involves a strengthening of the party apparatus at the expense of the military. Here the issue is in greater doubt. The military has been considerably weakened politically in the past four years, but senior commanders, of course, control troops and a number probably have unappeased political ambitions. Strains between the party and the military establishment could develop early in the succession period, particularly if military leaders believe army prerogatives are being whittled away and military concerns are being given short shrift.

In the immediate succession period a key role will undoubtedly be played by Teng Hsiao-ping. He is slated to assume Chou's position as premier, and he also holds important party and military posts. In the latter capacity he now serves as army chief of staff. Teng, however, is far from the universally-admired figure Chou En-lai has been. He was purged and reviled in the Cultural Revolution and still bears political scars from that period of upheaval. As a former secretary-general of the party he is a strong advocate of party domination of the affairs of state, but he seems sensitive to the crucial role of the military in current Chinese politics and has been inserting supporters in the central military establishment and, in particular, appealing to the technically-oriented military group that hopes to modernize China's armed forces. In the effort both to control and appease the military, the role of Chen Hsi-lien is likely to be of major importance. Chen is probably anxious to protect military prerogatives and as commander of the crucial Peking Military Region his troops are in a position to overawe the capital. If reports that he is charged with China's military procurement program are correct he probably has a vested interest in the modernization of the armed forces.

Teng will also have to look over his shoulder at Chang Chun-chiao once the succession period has begun. In his mid-60s, Chang is significantly younger than the 71-year-old Teng, he is an adroit politician in the mold of Chou En-lai, and he also holds important posts in the government, military and party apparatus--the only leading figure other than Teng to hold jobs in all three major institutions. Chang is in an excellent position to gather in most of the marbles in the longer run, and developments in the succession period may well turn on his relations with Teng. Although he holds a high military position as chief of the military's General Political Department, Chang's relations with the military have generally been unfriendly--a significant disability. He is probably acting as secretary-general of the party, however, and in this capacity may well have inserted supporters in the middle and lower ranks of the party apparatus. Moreover, although he has generally adopted moderate and "pragmatic" political positions in recent years, he first made his mark in the Cultural Revolution and unquestionably has closer ties to the "radical" wing of the party than does Teng.

Over the longer run these ties could prove important. Historically, the authoritarian, centralized and party-dominated approach to running the Chinese state has proved inflexible and unresponsive to the needs and concerns of the lower ranks of the political machine; counterpressures could easily rise again as they did in the mid-1960s. In the past several years there have been numerous signs of dissatisfaction with Peking's relatively "conservative" domestic politics on the part of the "radical" wing of the party, and recently there have been some indications that pressures also exist for a more "revolutionary" foreign policy. As political "outs," the left wing of the party has something in common with the military, which has also suffered reverses in recent years, and over the longer term an alliance of convenience is possible. Such an alliance helped launch the Cultural Revolution, and there were signs in 1974 that a similar marriage of convenience was being attempted in the course of the anti-Confucius campaign. In this shadowy infighting Chen Hsi-lien--a classic "swing man"--appeared to play an important role.

The major representatives of the left in the post Mao/Chou collective leadership will be Chiang Ching (Mao's wife) and Yao Wen-yuan. Neither is an especially impressive politician and Chiang Ching in particular has recently suffered political reverses that are probably irreparable; Mao has disassociated himself from her, and she cannot claim to be the trustee of his "thought" in the succession period. Yao, still in his early 40s, could, however, play the part of spokesman for the "radicals" if pressures start building on the left. This is also true of Wang Hung-wen, nominally the third-ranking member of the party. Wang is even younger than Yao, and like Chiang Ching is partly discredited at present. His present political position is ambiguous, but he has good "radical" credentials and could play a part in a coalition of "outs" although he is unlikely to be a mover and shaker in his own right.

Over the longer term divisions also may develop along age lines as older leaders such as Teng Hsiao-ping and others of his generation grow more feeble. In this regard two younger party functionaries, Chi Teng-kuei and Hua Kuo-feng could prove of considerable importance. Both rose to prominence in the Cultural Revolution but have subsequently adopted relatively "pragmatic" political

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positions. Hua in particular, as head of China's security organs, is likely to play an important role in the succession collective.

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